DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 412 615 EA 028 675

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TITLE Searching the Silent Smiles of Women Superintendents: Did You Say Something?
PUB DATE 1997-09-00
NOTE 45p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; *Interprofessional Relationship; *Leadership Styles; Organizational Climate; Organizational Communication; Participative Decision Making; *Superintendents; *Women Administrators

ABSTRACT

While numerous feminist scholars have written about "silence," few have focused on the silence of women in powerful masculinized positions such as the superintendency. The purpose of the paper is to expose the silencing, the disallowing of voice in actual practice, or the "unnatural silence" (Olsen 1978) of women superintendents through a postpositivist qualitative examination of their talk. Data were gathered through interviews conducted with 13 women superintendents and with 2 people who had professional relationships with each of them (n=26), for a total of 39 interview respondents. The findings show that unnatural silence was a consistent counterpart to the women's experiences of voice. Further, all categories of settled talk (voice) found the women framing their experiences well within the traditional normative rules governing the behavior of women in our culture. When the women broke the rules they faced negative consequences. The categorization of unsettled and settled talk created a disturbance in what has traditionally been the settled rhetoric of educational administration. In the past, settled talk included: (1) power as dominance; (2) listening; (3) a masculine approach; (4) use of mouthpieces; and (5) being verbally responsible. The study found that two new configurations of settled and unsettled talk emerged from the narratives of women superintendents. With the current shift in the literature toward the valuing of shared, collaborative leadership, an opportunity for the reshaped-settled talk has emerged. A "soft" leadership approach, the notion of caring, and shared leadership are now accepted practices. One figure is included. (Contains 6 endnotes and 82 references.) (LMI)

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SEARCHING THE SILENT SMILES OF WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS: DID YOU SAY SOMETHING?

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September 12, 1997

running head: SILENT SMILES

EA 028 675

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SEARCHING THE SILENT SMILES OF WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS: DID YOU SAY SOMETHING?

> *Many women are in recovery from their "Nice-Nice" complexes, wherein, no matter how they felt, no matter who assailed them, they responded so sweetly as to be practically fattening. Though they might have smiled kindly during the day, at night they gnashed their teeth like brutes. . . . This too-nice over adaptation in women often occurs when they are desperately afeared of being disenfranchised or found "unnecessary."* (Estes, 1992, p. 92)

> *As feminist theory has developed over the past few decades, the silence of women has been the metaphor for women ignored, not listened to, and women not speaking.* (Schmuck & Dunlap, 1993, p. 2)

But what about women in positions of power -- such as the superintendency? How does the metaphor of silence apply to them? Are they ignored, not listened to? Don't they speak? The obvious answer: Of course they do. If so, is the feminist literature on "silencing" of any use to women superintendents? To be sure, while numerous feminist scholars have written about "silence" (For example, see Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986; Bernard, 1973; Collins; 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976; Olsen, 1978; Rich, 1979; Tannen, 1990), few[1] have focused on the silence of women in powerful masculinized positions such as the superintendency. And because women superintendents are known to speak, one might believe that the power inherent in such a position overrides much of the silencing that constrains most women.

The purpose of this paper is to expose the silencing, the disallowing of voice (in actual practice), or the "unnatural silence" (Olsen, 1978) of women superintendents through a postpositivist qualitative examination of their talk. Like Susan Chase (1995), I believe that "talk is a form of social action worthy of study in itself" (p. 25). This qualitative study -- conducted from

1992 to 1996 -- is part of a larger data base collected to look at several issues around women in leadership.

The paper begins with a discussion of the usefulness of postpositivist research methods, followed by a description of the method design. Then, the main section of the paper, "Sounds of Silence: Analysis and Findings," identifies and examines one major and four minor emergent themes taken from across the data. The emergent themes become the organizer for this section, each in turn examined for "unsettled" and "settled" (Swindler, 1986, as cited in Chase, 1995) talk.

The next section, "Did you say something?" summarizes the highlights of the analysis and findings, and the paper ends with, "Unsettling a Settled Model of Talk," suggestions for what can be learned from this exposure of women superintendents' talk about silence.

Research Methods and Design

As the primary need of this study is to understand a complex human experience related to voice and silence, positivistic research methods have been set aside. A definitive critique of positivism which finds it inadequate in the face of the complexities of human experience has been established in the literature (Acker, Barry, & Essevold, 1983; Apple, 1991; Barone, 1990; Bernstein, 1976; Best & Kellner, 1991; Capper, 1993; Cherryholmes, 1988; Clegg, 1989; Cronbach, 1975; Eisner, 1990; Feinberg, 1983; Foster, 1986; Fraser, 1989; Giroux, 1981; Guba, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Kaplan, 1964; Lather, 1991; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Maxcy, 1994; Mishler, 1979; Scheurich, 1990; Smith & Heshusius, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988). This definitive critique radically questions the processes of scientific inquiry which make everything knowable through the supposedly impersonal norms and procedures of "science" (Apple, 1991).

The dominant positivist paradigm, with its "fundamental tenets of science, including objectivity, researcher-object/subject separation, empirical verification, cause-and-effect order in the world, . . . the unity of sciences," and the search for the "Truth," retains its central position in practice. However, in no small measure, its theoretic position has been disrupted and displaced by

interpretive and critical paradigms (Scheurich, 1990, p. 2). Interpretive and critical paradigms, broadly defined, are epistemologies based not on "objectivism but on subjective perception and meaning making" which allows representations of multiple-truth social realities (Lather, 1991).

These multi-truth representations of social realities are important because the dominant culture's view of realities is "partial." In contrast, the subordinate culture's view has the potential to be more "complete" (Nielson, 1990, p. 48). This greater completeness comes in the form of more information which has been typically overlooked. And although the subordinate culture's view of social realities also has limitations, it provides access to those subordinate views of silence which have been neglected in the literature.

The qualitative methods used in this study are referred to as postpositivist (Lather, 1991).

Theoretical Underpinnings of Postpositivist Research Methods

Ways of knowing, seeing, and perceiving are culture-bound. Researcher values and position in culture and the researcher's own practices, permeate the inquiry (Fraser, 1989; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, as a female researcher, I note my position in the research in order to expose my biases. I acknowledge that it is important that my own voice is heard as I have been silenced in the same way other women administrators have. This story is my story, too. It is my view -- as a former white female educational administrator and current university professor -- that becomes privileged in this study, narrows the raw data from the field, and dictates which part of the data is made available to the reader. As researcher, I make myriad decisions, often, unaided by those researched. My inquiry, then, becomes an interpretive act that occurs with the writing of texts, and as with any form of writing, certain constraints partially determine what is written (Van Maanen, 1988).

Even with these constraints, postpositivist research is important because it supports women in positions that have most often been filled by men by: 1) allowing previously unheard voices to participate in the discourse "to correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991, p. 71); 2) arguing that alternative views are useful in current society when all sectors are calling for a leveling of

hierarchical power, for leadership styles that are collaborative in nature, for a valuing of all voices, and for a valuing of diversity; 3) suggesting that the feminine versions of silence include positive views which recognize that "listening" (a type of silence) is necessary not only for shared decision-making, but also for moral practice frequently identified as an "ethic of care"[2] (Beck, 1994; Brunner, 1998; Noddings, 1984, 1991; Purpel, 1989).

The Method Design[3]

Drawing from an original sample of a list of all women superintendents in the nation, I asked people in the educational arena -- including directors of professional organizations, national headhunters, and university contacts -- and in the private sector to select women superintendents whom they considered to be successful. My intention was to call on people in major national networks with personal knowledge of superintendents of schools who could identify successful women. I then shaped these experts' lists into one consonant with my time and logistical limitations.

A total of 39 respondents were interviewed for this study -- 13 women superintendents and two other people who knew them (central office administrators, board of education members, powerholders in the community, building-level administrators, and teachers).[4] This stage included two face-to-face interviews (60 to 90 minutes) with the women superintendents and one interview each with at least two other people who knew them. The 58 interviews, which were recorded and transcribed, were conducted in settings most convenient for the participants (most often in their offices). (Several triangulation interviews were conducted over the phone.)

In order to determine what the women in the study thought about their powerful positions, I asked the following lead questions: 1) Define power. 2) Describe how you get things done; how you make decisions. 3) Explain why you do things that way. I moved from these lead questions into an unstructured, open-ended, free-flowing conversation. During the conversation, I probed comments made about strategies and difficulties related to voice/silence.

The Process for Data Analysis

The lived experiences of the participants served as data for the study. That means "data are used differently," as Lather (1991) stated. "Rather than to support an analysis, they are used demonstrably, performatively" (p. 150). Eisner (1988) expanded on this particular use of data when he stated that "it is more important to understand what people experience than to focus simply on what they do" (p. x). This focus on the importance of experience in educational research is echoed in the works of Greene (1991), Connelly and Clandenin (1988), Miller (1992), Ayers (1992), and Schubert (1992). Furthermore, while there is a current emphasis on the significance of teachers' experiences, very little work has been focused on administrators' experiences; particularly, according to Shakeshaft (1989), there are few individual accounts, biographies, histories, case studies, or ethnographies centered on women administrators (p. 56). By providing individual accounts of the lived experiences of women administrators, this study adds a relevant piece to existing knowledge in educational research.

In keeping with established methods of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Strauss, 1987) data analysis was continuous, took place at many levels for different reasons, and followed four steps (Conrad, 1982). First, data analysis was done in the field as data were collected. At this level, analysis was done to create additional questions for use in upcoming interviews (I asked respondents to help with this.). In addition, my own interpretations of the ideas I heard in interviews were shared with the respondents during the interview process. I asked questions to make certain that I understood the meaning intended both explicitly and implicitly.

Second, after the interviews were transcribed, I practiced reciprocity (Lather, 1991) by giving participants copies of their own transcripts and by sharing my interpretations of the narrative data. Participants quite naturally commented on my interpretations, shaping them further. Another part of the reciprocity process, consisted of a second 60- to 90-minute interview with each woman superintendent. These interviews -- done with the intention of collaboratively analyzing data -- were transcribed and used to inform and shape preliminary narratives. It is also important to note

that all interviews were done in private rather than public settings allowing the discussions more latitude.

Noddings (1984) provided direction with her assertions that it is through reciprocity that we focus our attention on how to meet the other morally. In a study focused on the "unnatural silence" of women superintendents, meeting the participants morally included allowing significant time for collaborative data analysis. With collaboration as a goal, participants were asked to analyze their own perceptions as well as collective perceptions from other participants. Suggestions from the participants became an integral part of the collaborative process that made sense of the emerging collaborative theory (Lather, 1991).

Third, data analysis was done to organize the data, to pull it together into a taxonomy or category. Susan Chase's (1995, p. 6-32) method of analysis was instructive as I wrestled with what she referred to as the "discursive disjunction" between the way the women superintendents in her study talked about their professional lives and the way they talked about their experiences of inequality. I, too, experienced this disjunction in the narratives of the women in my study, and consequently adopted Swindler's (1986, as cited and discussed in Chase, 1995, pp. 22-23) categories "settled" and "unsettled" as a way to categorize the narrative data. Chase explains her use of the terms:

> Colleen and I asked questions and women superintendents told their stories within the constraints and resources provided by the settled discursive realm of professional work on the one hand, and the unsettled discursive realm of inequality on the other. As a relatively settled, traditional part of American culture, the discursive realm of professional work shapes talk in ways that we take for granted. And as a relatively unsettled, explicitly ideological part of American culture, the discursive realm of inequality shapes talk in ways that make us self-conscious about what we are saying and how our speech will be interpreted. The disjunction between these two discursive realms is constituted by their settled and unsettled characters. (p. 23)

And, while I used these two categories to organize the narrative data in my study for the same reasons that Chase discussed them, I stopped short of Chase's search for the "narrative strategies" within individual participant narratives that *connected* "settled talk" about self as an accomplished professional and "unsettled talk" about self as a "subjected person" (p. 23). Rather, I followed inquiry and analysis methods which identified emerging themes [labeled "topics of talk"] -- which were examined for relatively unsettled and relatively settled elements -- based on *what* women superintendents said about their experiences. I drew my findings from across the interviews. All 13 women are represented in the text at least twice.

Sounds of Silence: Analysis of the Narratives

One major "topic of talk" and four minor "topics of talk" emerged from the narrative data: 1) Power Talk (major); 2) Silence Talk; 3) Style Talk; 4) People Talk; and 5) Responsible Talk. Each topic of talk has elements that fall into both the "unsettled" and the "settled" categories. The "unsettled" category contains talk about inequality -- specifically different types of unnatural silence -- that is a relatively unsettled, uncomfortable, self-conscious talk, made so, in part, because of the speakers' fear of how they may be perceived. The "settled" category contains talk that is a relatively settled, traditional part of American culture -- talk that is comfortable in the realm of professional work. [The narrative quotes of participants in my study are italicized.]

Topic One: Power Talk[5]

Unsettled Power Talk: Silenced by Power

When I asked women administrators in the study to define the term power, several of them had difficulty. One of the women superintendents, for example, revealed that even while in the powerful position of superintendent of schools she still did not feel comfortable with the notion of power as the dominant culture defines it.

> *I'm always a little bit surprised when people talk about the power that one holds as a superintendent because it really doesn't seem that particular concept of what power has been is part of my definition [original emphasis].*

One participant in research done by Adler, Lancy, and Packer (1993) echoed the woman superintendent above by further distinguishing between power as defined by men and her definition of power, "I'm interested in power and want it, but not in replicating male power" {p. 105). Women in my study were unsettled, uncomfortable with this dominant conception of power.

Theoretical analyses of the concept of power generally occur along two primary trajectories (Clegg, 1989, p. 21-38; Hartsock, 1981, p. 3-19; Pitkin, 1972, p. 276-77; Stone, 1989, p. 219-33; Wartenberg, 1990, p. 9-50). The dominant trajectory in the history of political thought and in contemporary political science defines power as control, command, domination over others -- as "power over" (Clegg, 1989; Hartsock, 1981). It is this conception of power -- which is not traditionally feminine -- that was unsettling for the women in the study.

Some of the women were not as clear, as the woman above, about why they were uncomfortable with the mere mention of the word "power."

> *I, let's see -- I look at power as -- how do I look at power? This is interesting because power is not a word that's regularly in my vocabulary.*

Raymond's (1986) description of this phenomenon was helpful. She said that "many women tend to regard power ambivalently, as something to be avoided, something that corrupts, and something that is always used over and against others . . . many women having been victims of patriarchal power, have assumed uncritically that power itself corrupts" (as quoted in Adler, Laney and Packer, 1993, p. 105).

Naomi Wolf's (1993) research on women's socialization around the concept of power was also useful in analyzing this phenomenon. At one point she stated:

> Obviously, there is a taboo that make it virtually impossible in "women's language" to directly claim power or achievement. But women's willingness -- indeed, their eagerness

> -- to do so when it seems "safe" suggests that this reluctance is not due to women's aversion to asserting their strengths and successes; it is due to women's sense that they are not allowed to assert them (p. 250).

Women in my study struggled when talking about power. Because it was not "safe" to talk about it in most settings, they didn't have the language to talk about it even in the safety of a private interview. This struggle was especially intense given the fact that they occupied a position that is viewed as powerful -- the superintendency. One woman talked about the unsafe or "negative" implications for women related to the notion of power.

> *I have a difficult time with the word power because it has negative connotations for me. Culturally women were not supposed to be the power base. And their being powerful was not looked upon as a positive characteristic for a female. And so, when you asked me about power, I wanted you to know that I wanted to get around the word. I just want to tell you that as a female, the word just isn't a good word (laughing).*

Wolf's (1993) research supports this woman's sense that power is something to be avoided because of influence from not only the dominant male culture, but also from female subcultures. As Wolf asserted,

> [w]omen's claim to power is not held in check only by men; standards set by other women create a strong force that can either inhibit female self-assertion or let it flourish. Women are deeply conditioned to fear visibly "rising above" other women, and their claiming of power is largely determined by how much latitude other women permit them. If the female subculture lets women act like winners, they will; if it punishes that behavior, most will have a much harder time producing it. (p. 250)

Adler, Laney, and Packer's (1993) findings extend Wolf's work. They discovered that women even in less powerful (than the superintendency) positions had difficulty reconciling their role as women with any idea of power. This is evident when they quote a teacher in their study as saying, "I was brought up to be a good little girl. And power doesn't sit easily with that" (p. 95). It is not a grand leap to assume that since most of the child rearing has been done by mothers in our culture,

this woman was most strongly influenced by her mother. Accepting this assumption, one could conclude that the woman's mother, as part of a powerful female subculture, taught her daughter that being "feminine" and being powerful do not mix.

Intense discomfort with the term "power" caused some women in the study to find other ways to talk about power in order to avoid the term. One woman said that she was more comfortable using the term "leadership style" rather than the word "power". When I asked her to define power, she said:

A. I would prefer to talk about leadership style than the use of power.

Q. Why?

A. Probably because that's a more gender-appropriate word. It's OK for me to talk about leadership. It's not always OK for me to talk about power. When I talk about power or act on power, then the negative words start to flow in terms of describing my behavior.

A statement from Wolf (1993) illuminate some of the negative responses this woman identified that caused her to chose the word "leadership" over the word "power":

> The greatest barriers to women's will to power and leadership were the fear of criticism and the fear of having too much. The women I spoke with described being on the receiving end of criticism as feeling almost physically painful, like a series of blows that left them virtually incapacitated. Many expressed what I too had learned: The punishment they saw as being an inevitable consequence of taking power made the pursuit of leadership or success seem "not worth it." Many saw becoming a leader as dangerous. Paradoxically, they said that the more visibility, recognition, and power they had, the less they felt in control (p. 251).

The women in the study cautiously searched for ways to talk about power that would ensure their safety. They needed to talk about their work in a way that distanced them from the dominant culture's definition of power. I probed this issue with another woman:

Q. How do you reconcile the fact that you're a woman, and you are in a powerful position and yet the word "powerful" is not comfortable?

A. I think that what you do is you try to play it down.

Deborah Tannen (1994) discussed the affect of downplaying authority. She pointed out that often this action results in a person being less valued or recognized as accomplished. She suggested that it is possible that when a woman downplays her own authority, she is unintentionally encouraging others to downplay it too or perhaps even to question it (p. 184). "Wearing the mantle of authority lightly," she warned, "allows it to be more easily pushed off your shoulders" (p. 185). This idea was not foreign to the women in my study. In fact, one woman pointedly described her unsettled feelings about this issue.

> *I'm tired of earning power. I'm tired of earning it and creating it and collaborating to get it. I'm tired of the informal channels. I want a title. I want the salary. I want the responsibility, and I want people to expect it from me. I'm way beyond building those little vortexes of power in hoping that people will work with me. . . . But I would make a sweeping generalization that most women don't want power over.*

While the women in my study were unsettled when talking about power as defined by the dominant male culture, they did have a settled, comfortable way to talk about power as can be seen in the next section.

Settled Power Talk: When we all have it, I have some, too.

As stated above, theoretical analyses of the concept of power generally occur along two primary trajectories. The dominant trajectory that defines power as control, command, domination over others -- as "power over" -- and created unsettled talk for the women superintendents in the study. The second, subordinate (less emphasized, analyzed, and appreciated) trajectory defines power as a capacity to accomplish certain social goals through cooperation among agents with various interests and concerns -- as "power with/to" (Follett, 1942; Sarason, 1990).

While (mostly) male political theorists and scientists were proposing and analyzing various aspects of "power over," the most prominent female political theorist of the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt, sought to reestablish the subordinate trajectory of power that had been largely abandoned by contemporary analysts. According to Arendt (1972, p. 143), "[p]ower corresponds

to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together."

Arendt was concerned that politics had degenerated into a mere power struggle, characterized by the use of strength, force, and violence. For Arendt, politics was more than a matter of domination; it was or could be a process by which free and equal agents create collective power, the capacity to act in concert to achieve collectively those common goals that individuals cannot achieve for themselves. Politics thus involves acts of persuasion, communication, and cooperation that establish collaborative relationships among people and that enable transformations of problematic social conditions. Power, then, is a capacity that a community of people attain when their acts of communication, cooperation and collaboration have been successful (see Ball, 1993, p. 20-25; Wartenberg, 1990, p. 33-50).

Arendt's approach to the concept of power was emphasized and elaborated by Nancy Hartsock (1981, 1983), who clearly differentiated a masculine emphasis on power as domination from an alternative feminine tradition. According to Hartsock (1983),

> theories of power put forward by women rather than men differ systematically from the understanding of power as domination. While few women have theorized about power, their theories bear a striking similarity both to one another and to theories of power recently characterized as feminist understandings of power. My several cases clearly constitute only suggestive evidence for my argument. Yet I believe it is significant that I was unable to discover any woman writing about power who did not stress those aspects of power related to energy, capacity, and potential. (p. 210)

Hartsock did not propose a fixed alternative conception to power as domination, but found intriguing possibilities in the writings of such women as Arendt, Dorothy Emmet, and Hannah Pitkin. In Arendt, she saw a model in which the heroic person finds her power not through dominating others in competitive situations, but through "action in connection with others with whom one shares a common life and common concerns" (Hartsock, 1983, p. 217). In Emmet

(1953-54), she saw a useful distinction between coercive power and coactive power, and found a hopeful attempt to redefine power as "any kind of effectiveness in performance" (Hartsock, 1983, p. 223). In Pitkin (1972, p. 275), she saw an attempt to connect power to community and the capacity of the community to act toward common ends.

With the assertions of Arendt, Hartsock, and others (see Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Scott, 1986) as impetus for research, in a an earlier study of men and women powerwielders, I found that when powerful women defined power as collaboration, acting in concert with others, non-hierarchical, consensus-building, or "power to" they were defining it differently than powerful men who most often defined it as dominance or "power over"[6] (Brunner, 1995). Further, I found that "[w]omen who attain positions of power are most successful when they adopt female approaches to power which stress collaboration, inclusion, and consensus-building -- models based on the belief that one person is not more powerful than another" (p. 24). Jacobs and McClelland (1994) agreed that "power [with]to" women in positions of authority are more favorably regarded than "power over" women.

Women superintendents in this study believed in and practiced this traditional "feminine" approach to power and had a unique sound as they talked about power. One woman stated her views as follows:

> *I see power as something you don't get, but something someone gives to you. You don't take it. . . . I don't try to control people.*

This superintendent believed that power was a gift to her from others. She felt strongly that the way she got things done was <u>with</u> other people -- that is, relationships were key when accomplishing things. This attitude was echoed by other women superintendents in the study. Others responded to my questions related to power with statements like these:

- *I guess I would define power as the ability to get things done through other people.*

- *You need to be able to let go of your power. . . . [You do that] by being a good consensus builder, by bringing people in and helping them to become leaders in their own roles in your school system.*

- *Power to me means serving. It's servant leadership. Power means assisting other people to accomplish their goals, and that has a lot to do with the issues of collaboration and linking -- Linkage and bringing people together.*

- *You really give yourself power when you watch the success of those that you work with . . . . It [power] is the freedom for people to be all that they can be . . . . I believe that you don't make decisions in isolation.*

- *I guess that I would say that power is the ability to bring consensus and get things done that have to be done . . . .*

- *There are several versions [of power] -- there's certainly personal power, there's position power, and then there's power to build coalitions.*

- *To me the definition of power is a sense that I had a part in making something happen that maybe wouldn't have happened without my part in it.*

The women in this study reported that they used power as a collaborative, inclusive consensus-building model with their own voices heard in concert with others rather than from a position of authority or dominance over others. While the women superintendents were settled and comfortable talking about power defined in this traditional "feminine way," I was skeptical. Was their socialization so strong that they *knew* that traditional feminine rhetoric was all that was acceptable? Was collaboration just another way to get permission? Were they just talking in a

traditional, settled way so they could stay in their powerful positions and be allowed to use power in the way men have been socialized to use it, as control, authority?

I thought that the noble self-reports from these women superintendents about the importance of others might be rhetorical and never actually carried out in practice. The triangulation process proved this notion false. When I interviewed people who knew and worked with the women superintendents in the study, I asked them to tell me how their superintendents made decisions and got things done.

- *She is less than direct -- it is more of a background substance that she possesses that is not confrontational, not frontal.*

- *She resisted the temptation to take the front position and recognized that the win had to be in a plurality.*

- *She is a quietly powerful person. She does not wield the power.*

Other comments were directly related to the collaborative nature of the women superintendents' decision-making processes.

- *She's very much into a team effort.*

- *Dr. _____[when making a decision] will come in with an issue and then people will talk about that backwards, forwards, inside and out. She questions people and they question each other. It's a very open forum.*

- *I guess the best way I would describe it [her decision-making style] is a participatory style of management. She involves a lot of people in decision-making. To the point where a decision really may not be even classified as her own, but it's classified as a group decision.*

> • *[in decision-making] She looks to the group a lot. Whatever group that may be. If it's a group of teachers, if it's a board subcommittee, if it's administrative cabinet, if it's a parent group, she'll look to the group for ideas, for input. She's not afraid, obviously, to share her ideas and put forth her position, her values, her beliefs about a particular situation, but she does it in such a way that she's not forcing it on people. She's not, and I don't even know how to characterize this, it's not as if the decision had already been made, and she's just simply going through the motions of asking for input and asking for involvement on the part of other people. She truly does seek, accept and use the ideas and input that people provide to her.*

Reports, given during triangulation, about the way the thirteen women in my study used power revealed that they stayed in the background as they worked with others, in collaboration, to get things accomplished. Perhaps this is one way that women addressed Tannen's concern -- discussed in the previous section -- about "wearing the mantle of authority lightly." By defining and using power as shared, collaborative, co-active, they shared the mantel of authority with others, making it unnecessary for others to push it off of their shoulders.

In fact, Tannen (1994) extended her discussion about women who downplay their own authority. She found that women managers considered their practice of downplaying their own authority as the important act of treating others with respect.

Anne Statham (1987; cited in Tannen, 1994) also found that women claimed that their management style was not authoritarian (p. 187). Statham quotes one woman as saying, "I don't care to have that type of attitude . . . you know, crack the whip. I feel more family-oriented to the whole lot of them" (Tannen, p. 187). Tannen continued by sharing Statham's findings:

> Statham points out that previous studies have divided managers into "task-oriented" and "person-oriented" is then taken to imply they are not "task-oriented," not a very good advertisement when times are hard and companies are concerned with the bottom line -- getting the task done. Statham concludes that the women she interviewed were both: They regarded focusing on people as the best way to get the task done. As one female manager

> put it, "If my people are happy, they are going to do a better job for me -- and they do." Statham notes that half the women she interviewed did not describe themselves as people-oriented; it was their secretaries who did (p. 187).

Statham's findings parallel mine. First, the women in my study were uncomfortable, unsettled with power defined as authority, control, or dominance. They could, however, talk easily about power as shared, "getting the task done with others" -- a position very similar to that of the women in Statham's study. They responded to me with settled talk when they spoke about power in this way.

Topic Two: Silence Talk

Unsettled Silence Talk: Overt Silencing

While most expect that the positional power gained from the superintendency prevents women from having the experience of silencing, I found that it didn't. In fact, the reason I limited my sample for this study to women superintendents rather than to include women administrators at all levels was to discover whether their positional power rid them of the phenomenon of what feminists have referred to as "silencing" or being disallowed voice (see Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Bernard, 1973; Gilligan, 1792; Lerner, 1979; Miller, 1976; Tannen, 1990). Tillie Olsen (1978) referred to this type of "silencing" as unnatural. The women superintendents in my study experienced unnatural silencing in a variety of ways.

One woman talked about body language -- school board members who turned away when she spoke.

> *Sometimes I experience body language when I'm speaking, very negative body language, particularly when I'm speaking to the board as a group, as a whole. And it's eye rolling, sighs, shoulder sagging, closed, arms come folded, talking while I'm talking. It talks pretty loud.*

Another woman shared that, at times, board members just didn't listen while she was presenting information -- something she had not seen happen to men in her position.

The biggest thing though is they don't really want to listen to me. They've already decided what the situation is long before I've even begun to speak.

Others talked about meetings with their male colleagues, who dominated, interrupted, talked about topics either uninteresting or inappropriate for women, and, in general, left them out of conversations.

If I'm talking to a group of males I find that they are more apt to do more talking than a group of women. Stereotypically we picture that women do more talking than men and I've not found that to be true. I find that men like to hear themselves talk. They talk more. They talk louder. I'm not sure they're always listening. It's a learning process. They just talk. . . . But they're very boisterous, they tend to butt in, they're louder. Women are always said to be the talkers, and I don't find that. I find myself and other women in the group sitting back more not being willing to speak out because we seem to be dismissed. I mean we kind of get like a head shake, and then they go on to the next male.

This woman is clearly talking about interruptions that subordinate her to the men in a group. The men she refers to are not interrupting in the way referred to as "overlaps" by Deborah Tannen (1994). An overlap is not a dominating interruption. Rather it can be a way of establishing connection or support for the speaker. Tannen points out that in order to discern

> whether an overlap is an interruption, you must consider the context (for example, cooperative overlapping is more likely to occur in casual conversation among friends than in a job interview), speakers' habitual styles (overlaps are more likely not to be interruptions among those with a style I call 'high-involvement'), and the interaction of their styles (an interruption is more likely to result between speakers whose styles differ with regard to pausing and overlap). This is not to say that one cannot use interruption to dominate a conversation or a person, but only that overlap is not always intended as an interruption and an attempt to dominate (pp. 233-234).

The men referred to in the narrative above were interrupting. Interrupting is a form of unnatural silencing.

Other women talked about the discomfort they felt in groups of men because of the nature of conversations. They reported that the topics of conversations were often not of interest to them or were the occasions for power games. At these times, they chose silence rather than vocal participation. I asked one woman whether she wanted to speak during these conversations. She replied:

A. Oh, heaven's yes.

Q. What do you want to say?

A. If I were to say anything, it would be more kid-centered rather than fiscal-centered.

Q. Men talk more about money?

A. Yes

Q. Anything else?

A. They talk more about politics.

A couple of the women talked about the way their ideas were ignored in meetings with male colleagues. The following is a story about this type of silencing:

I will have an idea and talk about it. I will say that this is something we need to consider, and no one will say that's a good idea, bad idea, discuss it with me, or dialogue about it. It's sort of like it's just out there. It's on the table. Then they go to the next idea, which they might discuss. So the dialogue about my idea just doesn't happen.

Another type of silencing occurred with some of the women in the study who believed that they had to hide some aspects of expressing themselves. In order to survive, they felt that they needed to hide their emotions. As one articulated:

I tend to hold back emotional kinds of gestures.

Q. Hold them back?

A. Hold them back, yes.

Q. Because?

A. Acceptance. They tend to stop listening to you a whole lot faster if you have some emotionalism in your speech or in the way you express your ideas.

Another woman vividly described the need to hide her emotions when she said:

When you swim with the sharks, you can't let them know you are bleeding.

Q. What does that mean?

A. When you are working with a group of people who are out to control or who are into power play, they really like that kind of reflex -- one that make them feel that they are making you bleed. It gives them more power. I think there's a protective element that teaches you learn to control yourself in public. I think if you don't let them know you are hurting, it confuses them. It's kind of like smacking them in the nose you know.

Q. Does that mean that you hide your emotions?

A. Well, I hate to say that, but yes. I don't like having to admit it, either. I don't necessarily think that it is right. I think you should be able -- when you're dealing with people with integrity -- you should be able to bleed together so-to-speak. But then, it's not a shark vs. you. It's not the same kind of water as you're in when you're dealing with sharks.

Clearly, although women superintendents in the study enjoyed the greatest positional power bestowed upon any office in public education, they still experienced overt unnatural silencing.

Settled Silence Talk: I'm not silenced, I'm listening.

On the other hand, the women superintendents in the study also responded with settled talk about silence. In the first place, although they admitted that unnatural silencing occurred, they acknowledged that people, in general, usually listen to superintendents. They recognized the privilege of their positions. One woman said, "*But keep in mind, in a superintendency, you are a voice in your community. So, you are not silenced.*" Because of their recognition of the power of their positions, they were able to talk about silence in a settled way as well. Consider how one woman talked about her voice:

> *I simply say what I think needs to be said and know that my voice will somehow get heard. It may not be heard in the same way another voice might be heard, but it still needs to be heard. And I think that people need other perspectives, and I offer those.*

While she was aware that she might not be heard in the same way as a man, she knew she would somehow be heard because of her position. She was also committed to offering perspectives that were often marginalized. Her mainstream, central professional position as superintendent gave her an opportunity to speak with the potential of being heard in a way she had never before experienced. She felt good about the responsibility and opportunity to make a difference.

Another type of settled talk related to silence was focused on "listening," a kind of silence. Women in the study talked about listening as an important part of their communication skills. At times they were perceived as "silenced" when, in fact, they were listening.

Silence is a requirement for listening. Women are socialized to be listeners, in part, because men, at times, dominate conversations and/or devalue what women have to say. Most of the women in the study used silence (did not talk as much as they would have liked) to be accepted by their male peers, but primarily, they listened -- were silent -- because they believed it respectful and essential for gaining knowledge. All of the women spoke of the need to listen to people, specifically in order to get input. In triangulation, one participant reflected on this point,

> *She looks to the group a lot. Whatever group that may be. If it's a group of teachers, if it's a board subcommittee, if it's administrative cabinet, if it's a parent group, she'll look to the group for ideas, for input.*

The ability to listen was, in no small measure, a critical piece of the way they defined and used power. Collaborative or shared power by definition requires a substantial amount of listening.

One woman stated that others viewed her as someone who was "*always ready to listen.*" She also talked about her natural tendency to be quiet, "*I'm a very quiet person. I am someone who really is probably more introverted than extroverted.*" She elaborated:

My decisions are usually based on what's best for students and from the perspective of listening to others and gathering as much information about other's standpoints as I possibly can.

Another woman talked about what she had learned by listening to her male colleagues even at times when they were dominating the conversation:

I've learned that by sitting back and listening, I can learn a lot about how male boards function and think. Just by listening to the men superintendents themselves.

Q. What have you learned?

A. Just that there are a whole lot of politics, and they are always very pleasant. And sometimes it's politics for the sake of politics and not politics for the sake of education. One-ups-manship. More power control, more power based, control based conversation.

In triangulation, I consistently heard that the women superintendents in the study were extraordinary listeners. As one person said, "*She listens, collaborates, gets the best out of the people who are available to her.*"

One woman superintendent in the study clearly articulated the benefits of listening from the standpoint of the whole organization:

I think that the best communication really forces you to listen. I think if you build an organization based on good listening and caring about one another, that cultural communication is no longer an issue. It is no longer an issue because you are already listening carefully because you care about the person and what they have to say.

On one hand, the notion of silence as listening allowed the women in the study to maintain the integrity of their positions and at the same time honor the traditional picture of female as "quiet" -- thus, silence as listening became settled talk.

The *results* of and *reasons* for listening, on the other hand, go beyond the relatively superficial need for women to feel comfortable as superintendents. Clearly, authentic listening is an important part of superior leadership.

Topic Three: Style Talk

Unsettled Style Talk: Actions can speak too loudly.

The women in the study stated that they had to be aware of their style because a "direct" style was too harsh. One woman said, "*Women can't be directive or before long they are called bitches. So if women want to stay in power they have to find a way to circumvent by using a softer style.*" Another woman talked about the association between "being direct" and being authoritarian, "*I'm not seen as being authoritarian or direct. I associate 'direct' with being authoritarian.*" This reality for women was echoed in the work of Colleen Bell (1995) when she observed that school boards sometimes negatively evaluate women superintendents who are decisive and assertive or "direct."

Another woman in the study talked about the dangers for women when they were too "direct" in their speech. This directness was not accepted by men around her. She talked about what she learned in groups made up predominately of men:

> *You know if you're in an all male group, perhaps you do not act direct initially. Ordinarily I'm an extremely direct person. I will start out initially in a predominantly male-dominated committee or group, not being direct.*
>
> *Q. And you do that purposely?*
>
> *A. You know, it's simple because it's a learned characteristic that being direct is not acceptable in that group [all men]. The problem that I have is after I become very involved in what I'm doing, I forget about it. Sometimes I forget the fact that I am being direct.*
>
> *Q. What are the consequences of that behavior?*
>
> *A. Oh well, the consequences in a group like that is anywhere from being threatened that number one you can't get your idea implemented. And sometimes your idea will be redefined out of the mouth of another member of the committee or group and be accepted. But if you are a female, and you are extremely direct, and it becomes threatening to that group, you're not able to get as many ideas implemented as you might if you remembered*

to play the role that has been given to you [as a woman]. Now that's a nasty thing for a 58 year old woman to say.

The evidence that the women in the study were not perceived as having a direct style came during triangulation. One male respondent said, "*She is less than direct. It is more of a background substance that she possesses that is not confrontational, not frontal.*"

Settled Style Talk: Soft and Ladylike

Interestingly, to describe themselves in a comfortable way, the women (as reflected above) referred to themselves as having a "softer style" rather than a "direct style." The word "soft" is a reflection of the normative silence expected of women. Clearly, settled talk.

Settled talk about style occurred in more overt ways as well. For example, one woman said:

As a woman, I don't want my style to be like a man. I am not a man. I don't think that I would feel comfortable acting like one.

This statement certainly falls within the traditional cultural expectations for women and was repeated in many different ways during interviews. Some of the women were philosophical like the one following:

I believe people who are here [in this position] are comfortable with the fact that they are women by the time they have reached the position. They have forgone the struggle with believing that they must be thinking like or looking like a man.

Others were passionate:

I also think that women in leadership roles [her voice gets louder] must remember that they are women, and they where they are because they are women. And, we shouldn't act like a man.

One woman was instructive:

And so you know, I think it's also a sensitive thing to the people that you work with that you are simply cognizant of the fact that these are males that have mothers that were fine people. They respect women and they are open to working with, working for women, and

you don't alienate that sensitivity by trying to act foreign to that. In other words, behave like a lady.

Key in this quote is the explicit use of the word "lady." Without a doubt, this woman was expressing the traditional expectations of women; that is, to be ladies. One woman went even further when she detailed "ladylike" style: "*We're respectable by the way we sit, by the way we dress, by the way we conduct our business.*" This style talk about being softer, about being ladylike, about not being a man, was well within the normative framework of "feminine" -- very settled.

Topic Four: People Talk

Unsettled People Talk: Mouthpieces

The women in the study talked about using other people (most often men) as spokespersons. One woman talked about how she used men to speak for her when the mayor wouldn't listen to her because she was a woman:

The mayor that came in was much more adversarial toward the school district and the gender issue was difficult. I'm really not sure how comfortable he is working with a woman in authority, so I've tried to utilize the building-and-grounds people (men) to network with him in order to find his comfort level. And there's been much more progressive, positive communication between the two groups lately.

Another woman talked about one of her colleagues who knowingly spoke for her in order that other men in the group would listen to one of her ideas. She told the story:

I am one of two females in a group of maybe 50 male superintendents. I am also the only female out of ten of us who are the executive committee of the group. In that group when I have an idea, I will say that this is something we need to consider and no one pays any attention. The group just goes on to the next idea. But there is a superintendent in the group who has noticed this on his own and chuckled about it. So, when he notices it happening, he takes my idea -- like one time he actually read it off my paper -- and he put it

out there. Then it was welcomed and discussed, and that was the direction we went. And later, the two of us sort of looked at each other -- and he knew why it had happened.

Another mentioned a similar strategy:

And sometimes the approach is to get other people involved when you know that certain things need to come [from someone else] because that's part of what they want. They become the spokesperson on this issue that we worked on. I get them to be the voice if necessary.

In these comments, the women admitted that the voices of other people needed to be used to express their ideas. For these women superintendents, the most important thing was that their ideas were somehow heard. They were, however, uncomfortable and unsettled when sharing this information because they knew that traditionally superintendents are allowed and expected to speak for themselves. They understood what Marshall (1985) meant when she stated that "men have been equated with power, while the power women were perceived to have was largely a reflection of the power of the man with or for whom they worked. Women did [do] not have power on their own" (p. 12).

Settled People Talk: Equal Voicing

On the other hand, the women superintendents were quite settled and comfortable when they talked about how and why they ensured that other people had the opportunity to speak for themselves. The most prominent reason the women in the study made certain that other people spoke rested on their belief in collaborative or shared power (as reflected in the section "Settled Power Talk"). Collaborative or shared decision-making, at its best, occurs when all voices are equally valued and expected to be a part of all processes. The women in the study asserted their belief in such practices in many ways. One woman emphasized her valuing of individuals in terms of making certain that what they said was taken seriously and understood. She said:

I ask myself, how do you help to hear what's going on? How do you help to establish a respect for all individuals? Certainly you can go further into some of the discussions and ask what did he or she really say.

Another woman in the study talked about how important the people in her district were to her:

> *The member of the staff are so dear [original emphasis] to me. For the most part I guess my success is in being able to hang on to the development of some kind of relationship in this crazy time in public education. You have to hang on to some very special aspects of internal relationship. If I am successful, I really believe it is because I have such successful people that make me look good.*

For this woman and for others in the study, relationships with the people in their districts were significant and meaningful. Maintaining these relationships had results in terms of positive outcomes in their districts. As a participant noted in triangulation,

> *Because she is able to establish relationships, because she is able to work with a variety of people, so many people, she has been able to accomplish a lot in our district.*

One woman talked about collaboration and the connection between her relationships with the people in her district and the quality of work that they did. She said, "*The people work harder when they can work together and when they are not fearful of consequences. But they also have to know that you care about them.*"

All of these comments point to a philosophy of caring that people have opportunities to speak, to be heard, to be valued and respected, and to be successful productive people in an organization. One participant in triangulation verified that his superintendent made certain that people in the organization were valued in this way. He said:

> *She is a superb leader who has 20/20 vision yet values people's participation truly, honestly, and genuinely, and though she doesn't really need a lot of participation, she grows with it and moves with it and changes with it and really does help people to feel that they're part and parcel of a large and important collegial mission.*

Another participant offered:

> *She's very much into getting as many people as is practical involved and allowing everyone an opportunity to have his/her say.*

Clearly the way the women superintendents in the study cared about the people in the organization was specific in many ways: The women treated others as they believed all people should be treated. They believed in the equal input of others because it was evidence of caring about all individuals in the first place. As one woman in the study said:

> *You need to have other people become powerful around you so that they will want to bring positive change and have the power to do that.*

Nel Noddings (1984) characterizes this belief system as the feminized moral responsiveness of human caring (p. 1). For women superintendents to act based on human caring is expected by the traditional American cultural ideal of "mother" and "feminine." This type of people talk was comfortable and settled.

Topic Five: Responsible Talk

Unsettled Responsible Talk: Too much, too little, too often, too soon

As stated earlier, the women superintendents in the study knew that superintendents are expected to speak, to be responsible in their roles, and to speak out whenever required or needed. A large part of a superintendent's role requires "responsible talk." As has been reflected throughout the paper, speaking out is more difficult for women because of societal constraints. In order to remain responsible in their roles, the women in my study reported different strategies and tactics that facilitated their efforts to speak. Consider the timing tactics used by one women when she was working to be a responsible member of a group:

> *When I was first in administration, I found myself mainly in the "quiet persistence" category. All of my colleagues were the good old boys type males. That was the way to get an entry -- was to attend the meetings. . . . They didn't know how to deal with me. So I found that what was most useful was to sit and listen. Then quietly persist in getting my point across. For example, I would say, "We talked about doing so and so, and if we should . . . ." And I would repeat what I wanted to say -- persistently pursue -- what I thought was important. It is a case of choosing your wars carefully and staying out of battles.*

This woman used the term "quiet" to describe her strategy to be heard. Again, I witnessed the use of a term that alluded to the silencing of women.

Another woman used the same strategy when making the effort to be a responsible member of a group of superintendents. She was talking about the difficulty she had sharing her ideas during discussion. I asked her:

Q. So, what do you do to enable yourself to be heard?

A. Ah, I wait. In a new group, usually I'm not that assertive and aggressive. . . . All the area superintendents are male with the exception of myself and now one other woman. I found what I do is I sit back until I've been with the group for a while rather than try to assert my opinion. I find that I don't speak as often as I would like to when I have opinions.

Q. So how do you decide when to talk?

A. Well, you know I just wait until I've earned the trust of the group. Just a few words here and there. Initially I would choose topics that I was very sure about.

Another woman in the study shared how she had to talk differently to her board of education so that they would consider what she had to say. She felt it was her responsibility to do so or she wasn't doing her job.

And I don't know what I can say about how I have to speak differently. I feel that many times I have to dumb-down what I know, and put it in terms of being able to reach them. That's not true of all boards I've worked with, however. This particular board has a gender issue, and so it's more prevalent.

It wasn't clear to me why "dumbing down" her speech made this woman's board listen to her, perhaps she needed to do this so the men felt superior and, thus, comfortable with male/female interaction. What was clear was that like the other women superintendents in the study, she had to figure out strategies and tactics in order to be a responsible member of groups and verbally responsible in her role.

Being verbally responsible meant not only being heard, but it also meant having the content of what was said, by the women, more closely judged and evaluated by others. So, in order to be responsible in talk, the women in the study reported that they had to be extremely knowledgeable and prepared -- far more so than their male counterparts. As one woman said:

> *I think that women basically have to talk the man's world. They have to know it, they have to be almost twice as knowledgeable about any issue because they're challenged more. And their credibility depends on them being able to give answers immediately whereas men are not thought of that way. And further, I think in a presentation of my budget, I have to be totally informed and, maybe this is only me, I just feel I have to have it all in my head to put forward and answer immediately. Whereas men don't give half as much in a presentation as a woman does. And they (men superintendents) are believed just as much and maybe more so, because the presentation is made by a man.*

Another woman echoed the woman above when referring to talk about her budget. She stated that her need to be extremely prepared was driven by comments she heard from others who stated, "Well, she knows what she's doing in education. She's really brilliant in education, but she really doesn't understand business." She felt she had to prove herself as someone extremely capable in the area of finance because of gender-bias.

Another woman, in a district with a multi-million dollar budget, had a similar story:

> *I don't think they felt I understood what a dollar or a dime meant. . . . I think that women and money are just not conceived of in the same sentences.*

Still another woman talked about people's surprise when she proved herself knowledgeable. She said:

> *You get a lot more questions than men get. But you also get a lot of, "Gee, I'm surprised you had so much information." You know, it's a shock, but it's common.*

Thus, women in the study felt they had to be more knowledgeable than their male colleagues, while, at the same time, people were shocked when they were. People were unsettled when the "dumber sex" knew more.

All of the women in the study were unsettled when they revealed the need for gender-bias counter tactics that enabled (sometimes not very effectively because of the double bind of bias) them to be verbally responsible.

Settled Responsible Talk: Just Right

The women superintendents were settled when discussing some types of responsible talk. For example, they talked about how they "practiced talking" in order to improve their skills. One woman reported:

> *Well, I think women haven't been trained from the time they are young to expect themselves to be the CEO and expect themselves to be demanded from or whatever. I think what is helping women is having small groups of women just sitting and talking.*
>
> *Q. Do you do that?*
>
> *A. Yes, I do that. I started that when I first became a superintendent. I was one of four women who get together, and we started meeting like every two weeks, and that was tremendously helpful. We met with a management consultant, that type of thing and as the groups have grown they've been great. And I think you find that a lot of people are doing it now.*

Saying that someone needs to "learn and practice the skills necessary for a role of responsibility" is certainly within the range of the traditional culture's settled talk. The women superintendents held themselves responsible for becoming the type of communicators that are needed in their roles -- even when they had to learn extra skills because they were women. They were quite settled and comfortable when discussing how they learned these skills. Consider the following woman:

> *I think what I learned was that the rules really change, and it gets pretty rough and pretty tough, and no one's going to teach you the rules, and if you're not really fast and really intuitive and don't make the first phone call and initiate the idea at the beginning -- if you're not the first one out of the chute -- people think you are a loser. And all of my own training in my socialization had been to be more respectful, collaborative, and collegial. And I think*

> *women have to understand that men are competitive, to shoot the first ball in the basket, throw the first pass, you know steal the first base, whatever it is that they do, and women aren't socialized to do that at all. And I got it quickly enough. I don't think I got it too quickly, but I think I understood quickly enough. I wish I had it more quickly. I needed to be a lot more aggressive in getting out there on issues with men, not with the public, but with the men I had to work with. Specifically, I needed to expect it.*

This woman was proud of her ability to "understand quickly enough." Especially since she understood the workings of the world of men -- the traditional professional work world of superintendents. She held herself accountable for knowing how the male world worked, going so far as to believe she should have "expected" it even though socialized female. She believed that women should be able to communicate "as men do" when performing the responsible talk of the profession.

Another woman emphasized the responsibility of communicating in many ways. As she stated:

> *I think a real part of leadership is communication in a variety of ways. You communicate through behaviors, you communicate in a variety of ways in order to exchange intangible and crucial and fragile information, do you know what I mean?*

That leaders must be able to communicate in a variety of ways is certainly a commonly identified skill of leadership. And while the women superintendents in the study admitted in unsettled discussion that "variety" often meant the ability to be "feminine" and "masculine," in settled discussion they talked about communication in a generic sense and were proud that they had developed the skills and tactics necessary to perform their duties as superintendents.

"Did you say something?"

Summary of Findings

While an oversimplification, Figure 1 summarizes the themes that emerged from the narrative data of the women superintendents in the study. Clearly, unnatural silence was a consistent counterpart to these women's experiences of voice. Further, all categories of settled talk (voice) find the women framing their experiences well within the traditional normative rules governing the behavior of women in our culture. It is when the women broke the rules that they faced negative consequences. The telling of stories about inequality was unsettled talk.

INSERT FIGURE 1.

Unsettling a Settled Discourse on the Superintendency: Possibilities for the Future

What is most interesting about the findings of this study is that the categorization of unsettled and settled talk creates a disturbance in what has traditionally been the settled rhetoric of educational administration. In the past (and, in part, currently), this settled talk included: 1) power as dominance; 2) listening; 3) a masculine approach; 4) use of mouthpieces (for reasons different than were discussed in this study); and 5) being verbally responsible. Clearly, when contrasting this list to the lists in Figure 1, it can be seen that settled talk from the past contains elements from both categories. Two completely new configurations of settled and unsettled talk have emerged from the narratives of women superintendents.

With the current shift in the literature toward the valuing of shared, collaborative leadership (see Carnoy & MacDonell, 1990; Murphy & Hallinger, 1993), an opportunity for the reshaped settled talk (seen in Figure 1) emerges. Suddenly, women superintendents can talk about sharing

power in a settled way. What has been strictly "feminine" becomes a generic way of thinking and acting. Further, other articulations that accompany shared leadership have a new position in the settled discourse. Consider, for example, "a soft approach." This type of approach, in the past, would have been perceived as weakness. Now there is potential for it being perceived as nonconfrontational, as an approach that encourages and supports the participation of others.

Next, the notion of caring in relationships -- previously thought to be a "female thing" -- becomes understood as a fuller type of respect. And finally, the "can do" attitude -- that is necessary when women manage the verbal responsibility of their roles in spite of barriers and difficulties -- becomes a sign of strength rather than a symptom of defeat or inadequate skill.

When considering the narratives and practices of women superintendents, the domain of settled talk about educational leadership (about the superintendency) has the space for embracing and accepting difference, the space for discourse that is settled even as it insists on equality. I believe that the "settled talk" model, articulated by the women superintendents in my study, offers guidance and direction for action to those seeking to change traditional leadership practices from ones in which a few are privileged to ones that give equal opportunity to all voices. Finally, I support Chase's assertion that

> [when] professional women fight against the sexism and racism they experience, they reduce the gulf between themselves and the disadvantaged people they serve. . . . Success in our professional work, in the struggle for equality, depends on collective action, on a community of colleagues who work together. (p. 192)

Notes:

1. Susan Chase, a sociologist, is one of the few. See, for example, Chase, S. (1995). Ambiguous empowerment: The work narrative of women school superintendents. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

2. Some feminists have been critical of the views of women and caring held by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984, 1991). These feminists are critical of any essentialized notion

of women (Weiler, 1988; cited in Ladson-Billings, 1995) and suggest that no empirical evidence exists to support the notion that women care in ways different from men or that any such caring informs their scholarship and work (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 473).

3. Because this study is part of a larger qualitative study designed to explore various issues facing women in educational leadership, certain aspects of the method and design section can be found in other papers written from the same data base. [AUTHOR CITATION]

4. I asked each superintendent to suggest several people whom they believed knew their practice well enough to discuss it with me. After receiving the names, I interviewed two people of my choice.

5. Portions of this section were taken from an earlier manuscript: [AUTHOR CITATION]

6. My (1995) study was based on the works of several social theorists -- Clegg (1988), Kreisberg (1992), Sarason (1990), Wartenberg (1990) -- who divide the literature on power along two trajectories which represent its dualistic nature. The subordinate trajectory defines power as the ability to do something or the "power to." The dominant trajectory, which assumes an asymmetrical or vertical relationship, defines power as control, command or dominion over others, or the "power over."

Figure 1.

	UNNATURAL SILENCE	VOICE
Talk about:	"Unsettled Talk" ways talk is shaped by inequality	"Settled Talk" ways talk is shaped by traditional work
1. Power	Power as dominance, control	Power as shared
2. Silence	Overt silencing	Listening (a type of silence)
3. Style	Negative consequences for being direct; too masculine	Positive reactions for soft approach; being a lady
4. People	Using others as mouthpieces	Making certain everyone has an opportunity to be heard; relational
5. Responsibility	Barriers blocking verbal responsibilities of role	Being verbally responsible regardless of difficulties

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